***The Counselling Service at Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds***

The Counselling Service at Support After Rape and Sexual Violence Leeds (SARSVL) offers specialist individual and group counselling appointments to women aged 18 and above who have experienced sexual violence at any point in their lives. Counselling is provided in a women-only space, in a confidential environment.

‘Sexual violence’ is any unwanted sexual act or activity. There are many different kinds of sexual violence, including but not restricted to: rape, sexual assault, child sexual abuse, sexual harassment, rape within marriage/relationships, forced marriage, so-called honour-based violence, female genital mutilation, trafficking, sexual exploitation, and ritual abuse. Sexual violence can be perpetrated by a complete stranger, or by someone known and even trusted, such as a friend, colleague, family member, partner or ex-partner.

As sexual violence can affect anyone SARSVL is open to all kinds of women, and therefore welcomes *LGBTQIA\*, BME\*\**, *non-binary\*\*\**, refugee and asylum seeking women into its Counselling Service. The Service is also accessible to women with disabilities.

*\*lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual*

*\*\*black and minority ethnic*

*\*\*\*any gender identity that does not sit within the binary of ‘female’*

***How can I access the Counselling Service?***

Before an assessment takes place a referral form needs to be completed. You are welcome to complete this yourself if you are able to, with another professional you trust, or at SARSVL with our support.

If you are happy to complete the form yourself or want a copy to complete with a professional you are already working with, it can be sent via e-mail/post to complete and return. Completed forms can be sent electronically to counselling@sarsvl.org.uk or to the PO Box address on the form.

The referral form can also be completed over the telephone with the Counselling Service Co-Ordinator, and this can take 20-30 minutes. Please do call in advance to arrange a time that suits you to complete it, if this is your preferred option.

If you need support from SARSVL to complete the form, please contact the Counselling Service to request an appointment.

***What happens next?***

Once a referral form is completed and received, an assessment can take place and would be done at SARSVL (Eastgate, LS2). An assessment would be with the Counselling Service Co-Ordinator who is a Counsellor & Psychotherapist, and her name is Erene. Assessments take between 60 and 90 minutes and usually one assessment appointment is offered, although it may be the case that a woman is seen for two appointments overall to complete the assessment.

There is a team of Counsellors within the Service that are trained and experienced in supporting women who have experienced sexual violence, and as such we offer a specialist service. Once an assessment is completed a woman would be placed onto a waiting list to start weekly counselling appointments. Therefore there is a gap between being assessed and starting weekly appointments.

Please note that the Counselling Service experiences high demand for appointments, which are offered in line with your availability. Therefore **we will make three attempts to contact you over the period of a month, upon receipt of your referral.** Should we be unable to do so and/or not hear from you in return, we will assume you do not wish to come for an assessment appointment at this time and will advise you of this in writing wherever possible.

Additionally, should we schedule an assessment and you cancel at short notice/don’t attend without prior cancellation **twice**, we will assume that you are not yet ready or willing to access the Counselling Service.

We understand that starting the process of counselling can be difficult, but hope you can appreciate that we are limited in the number of appointments we can offer. Should this happen, we will try to discuss this with you wherever possible.

***What kind of Counselling is available?***

The Service offers individual (one-to-one) and group counselling. Whichever type you choose to access is your preference, but you cannot do both. Each type is therapeutic work which is supported by a Counsellor.

Due to the nature of the work involved, it is not possible to offer counselling whilst you are due to, or are, working with another professional who is offering you psychological treatment (e.g.- a Counsellor, Psychotherapist, Psychologist). We can only offer counselling to women who do not currently have this need being met by other services.

Working with a trained professional outside of your current situation can be beneficial in managing the challenges specific to you that you finds difficult. All Counsellors are trained and experienced in working with trauma as a consequence of sexual violence. Each Counsellor practices from a different theoretical perspective, and all Counsellors work from a collaborative stance that supports recovery and

empowerment through relationship. Therefore we have a multi-disciplinary team within our specialist Service, and can allocate you to a Counsellor according to your preference (if you have one).

Group work is a unique opportunity to be with other women who have experienced sexual violence, and be supported by a Counsellor. Sometimes it is helpful and reassuring to be around others who have experiences and difficulties similar to yours, and working alongside several other people means that you can gain lots of different perspectives and strategies on what is affecting you.

We offer twenty sessions of counselling for women seeking one to one work, although sometimes we can offer longer. Longer term work is prioritised according to individual need, as we unfortunately cannot offer this to every woman that approaches the Service. For women accessing our group, forty sessions are offered.

Counselling is not simply a listening service, nor do we offer drop-in appointments for women wanting support outside of seeing their Counsellor. Counsellors can only provide therapeutic support for a woman’s mental health and general wellbeing, and cannot give you practical support/advice inside or outside of your appointments. Should you wish to access practical support SARSVL has an Advocacy Service which can help, and this can be discussed at appointments with the Counselling Service.

***How long will I have to wait to access the Counselling Service?***

Please be assured that we do all we can as a small organisation to meet the huge demand for specialist counselling for survivors in Leeds.

We will contact you within two weeks of receiving your referral form to arrange an assessment appointment. Women are currently offered an assessment appointment to take place within five to six months of receiving their referral form.

Once assessed, women on average currently wait around six months to be offered their first appointment with an individual Counsellor. If there are places within our group for counselling, women are seen within a month of being assessed and will start with the group immediately if there are places available.

***What if I am going through the criminal justice system in relation to my experiences of sexual violence?***

The Counselling Service at SARSVL is able to offer counselling to women who are currently engaged in the criminal justice system. This includes a report being made, a case currently being investigated, an upcoming trial or a trial that is underway.

Please be aware that the provision of counselling to women in the criminal justice system is subject to additional factors you will need to be aware of, in order to adequately support you. This will be explained, should this apply to you.

***I need information and practical support around a report of sexual violence I have made, or am thinking of making.***

If you also require information and practical support about reporting any sexual offence to the Police, or are currently involved in reporting to the Police, our Advocacy Service may be appropriate.

The Advocacy Service is an independent service working with women who have been affected by rape or sexual violence at any time in their lives. We help you to regain control of your life, make informed choices about issues affecting you, and access the support that you may need.

If you would like to access SARSVL’s Advocacy Service, you can e-mail via: advocacy@sarsvl.org.uk, or call: 0113 200 2930. If you are using the Counselling Service and would then like to access Advocacy too, simply let your Counsellor know and an internal referral can be made on your behalf.

***How can I contact the Counselling Service at SARSVL?***

Professionals and woman are welcome to make enquiries by email: counselling@sarsvl.org.uk or by telephone: 0113 200 2936. It is can also possible to write to the Counselling Service via PO Box 827, Leeds, LS1 9PN.

*All information correct as of July 2017.*